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POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

ROYAL AND NOBLE

AUTHORS.

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TO THE

Royal and Noble Authors.

AS I should be unwilling to defraud my country of any sparkle of genius that glimmered in our ages of darkness, especially when a claim has been made by foreigners for one of our ancient Peers, it is necessary to examine the pretensions, and allow them, if I can with a good conscience. The person in whose favour a title to the laurel has been set up is John Montacute Earl of Salisbury, who flourished in the reign of Richard the Second. The advocate is the editor of that voluminous collection the Bibliothéque des Romans, who in the first tome for October of the year 1779, p. 128, asserts, on the authority of Christina of Pisan, an authoress whom I have mentioned in the first part of this work, that the Earl not only delighted in

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dictiez, but was himself a *délectable dictieur*; and the editor explains the term *dictiez* in p. 126, by saying, that they were *petites pieces de poesie légeres, telles que les ballades, les lays, les virelays, & les rondeaux.*

Neither Christina nor the editor have gratified our curiosity with a single stanza of Lord Salisbury's composition; yet the following amorous declaration, which the lady has preserved, may fairly be presumed a translation of a *lay*, which at least she seems to intend we should suppose was the purport of one of his poetical addresses to her. "O la perle des plus beaux esprits, repondit il, comme la fleur des plus belles: vous avez chanté; il ne me reste plus de sons. O desir de mon cœur, plaisir de mes yeux, tourment de ma pensée, vous avez attiré à vous mon entendement & ma substance entiere; vous avez lié ma langue: tout ce que je puis faire à cette heure, c'est de vous voir & de vous entendre."

This declaration was galant and tender enough for a swain on the banks of the Lignon; and if Christina did not lend her lover both sentiment and expression, we must allow that the institutions of chivalry

chivalry had rendered our heroes as polite as they were valiant.

But before I can entirely admit the Earl of Salisbury into the choir of our earliest bards, it will be requisite to examine both his character and that of his fair voucher; and that discussion may perhaps make some slight amends for the loss of the Earl's ditties. I shall begin with the history of the lady from the anecdotes of her life in the work I have cited.

Christina was daughter of Thomas de Pisan, and was born at Bologna, the most flourishing school of literature, next to Florence, of that age. The reputation of Thomas for science spread so diffusely, that having married the daughter of Dr. Forti, a member of the great council of Venice, the Kings of France and Hungary were jealous of Venice possessing such a treasure, and invited Thomas of Pisan to adorn their respective courts. The personal merit of Charles the Fifth, surnamed the Wise, *la preponderance*, says my author, *du nom Francois*, and the desire of visiting the university of Paris, *tres brillante alors*, determined the illustrious stranger. Charles showered honours and wealth.

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on Thomas of Pisan; the *Wise* Monarch appointed him his astrologer, and fixed him in France, whither he sent for his wife and daughter, who were received at the Louvre, whither the people *enchanté de leurs magnifiques habillemens à la Lombarde* followed them with admiration and applause.

This happened in 1368, when Christina was but five years old. She was born with her father's avidity for knowledge, and was early instructed in the Latin tongue. At fifteen she had made such a progress in the sciences, and her personal charms ripened so fast, that she was sought in marriage *par plusieurs chevaliers, autres nobles & riches clercs*---yet she adds modestly, *qu'on ne regarde pas ceci comme vantage; la grande amour que le Roi demontroît à mon père, en étoit la cause, & non ma valeur.*

The King had bestowed on Thomas a pension of an hundred livres, payable every month, and equivalent to eight thousand four hundred livres at present, besides annual gratifications of *livres & autres bagatelles*: and that this bounty might not be thought extravagant in so oeconomic a Monarch, Christina, to prove the solidity of her father's knowledge, informs us that he died on the very
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hour that he himself had predicted, and that Charles owed much of the prosperity of his arms and of the great effects of his government, to the sage councils of Thomas of Pisan.

It is not, in fact, extraordinary, that the first rays of learning should have made strong impressions on a rude and illiterate age. A sunbeam admitted through the smallest aperture of a dark chamber, appears more vivid by the contrast than the diffused splendor of the whole luminary; which, though every thing is made visible by its emanations, imparts such general light that nothing seems to be particularly illustrated. Legislators, poets, philosophers, institutors of new religions, have owed a large portion of their successes to the darkness of the periods in which they have appeared: and with all the merit of their several institutions, productions, lessons, doctrines, they might have missed the éclat that has consecrated their names, had they fallen on less favourable, that is, better *doctrinated* aeras. With what difficulty does a genius emerge in times like the present, when poets and sages are to be found in every county, and in every magazine!

Stephen

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Stephen Castel, a young gentleman of Picardy, was the fortunate suitor that obtained the hand of the favourite astrologer's daughter; and the Sovereign who made the marriage appointed the bridegroom one of his notaries and secretaries. Christina adored her husband, whose character she has painted in the most favourable colours, and by whom she had three children—but this brilliant horizon was soon overcast! The King died: the uncles of the young successor thought of nothing but plundering the kingdom, and probably were not fond of predictions. Thomas's pensions were stopped, his son-in-law was deprived of his offices. Thomas, who, his daughter confesses, had been too liberal, fell into distress, grew melancholy, and soon followed his royal master. Castel, by his good conduct, for some time sustained the family, but was also taken off by a contagious distemper at the age of thirty-four.

The widowed Christina was deeply afflicted for the loss of her comfort, and had injustice and poverty to struggle with, as well as with her grief. Still she sunk not under her misfortunes, but with true philosophy dedicated her melancholy hours to the care of her children and the improvement of her mind,

mind, though but twenty-five at the death of her husband. She gave herself up to study, and then to composition. Poetry was a cordial that naturally presented itself to her tender heart, and coloured deliciously the sighs that she vented for her beloved but lost turtle. Yet whilst unfortunate love was her theme, the wound was rather mitigated than cured, and proved that a heart so sensible was far from being callous against a new impression.

In a word, ere her tears were dried for Castel, the Earl of Salisbury arrived at Paris, as Ambassador from his master to demand the young Princess Isabel in marriage. The beauty and talents of Christina outshone in the eyes of the Earl all the beauties of the court of France, and the splendor and accomplishments of the Personage were too imposing not to make his homage agreeable to the disconsolate, philosophic relict. Yet so respectful were the Paladins of those days, or so austere were the manners of Christina, that though they communicated their compositions to each other, in which as we have seen Salisbury by no means spoke mysteriously on his passion, yet the sage Christina affected to take the declaration for the simple compliment of a galant Knight, and the Earl blushing
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at having gone too far, vowed for the future to be more circumspect.

Christina's eldest son was about the age of thirteen. The discreet Earl, to prove at once his penitence and esteem, proposed to her to take the youth with him to England, declaring that he bade adieu to love, renounced marriage, and would build his future happiness on educating and making the fortune of her son. Far from being offended at so extraordinary an alternative, the tender mother resigned her child to that mirror of knighthood, and the too generous Salisbury departed with the pledge of his mistress's favour, which his unaccountable delicacy had preferred to one which it had been more natural to ask, and which some indirect queries which Christina confesses she put to him, induce us to think she would not have received too haughtily, if consistent with the laws of honour.

I will abridge my author's narrative, and hasten to the deplorable and rapid conclusion of so exalted a story. King Richard was deposed, and the usurper Henry of Lancaster immediately imprisoned his faithful servants, and struck off the head of his favourite

favourite Salisbury—a catastrophe which my zeal for romance would incline me to wish had been less precipitate, had not the austere dignity of history too clearly authenticated the event.

The ferocity of contending factions was no doubt a cruel drawback on the galantry and courtesy of that age, and many a gentle Knight lost his head on a scaffold, who had encountered giants and dragons (such giants and dragons as existed in the degeneracy of later times) and had even out-lived the frowns of his mistresses. But though I am impatient to examine the title of Lord Salisbury to the rank of Noble Author, I will not deprive the reader of a short summary of what farther relates to the interesting Christina.

The savage Bolinbroke, who she says found her *lays* in the portefeuille of her murdered lover, was yet so struck with the delicacy and purity of her sentiments, that he formed the design of drawing her to his court, and actually wrote to invite her—She! she at the court of the assassin of her lover!—horrible thought! impossible!—However, the decorum due to a crowned head, and who had taken into his custody and treated kindly her son,

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imposed on her the hard necessity of making a gentle but firm excuse; and though the Monarch twice dispatched a herald to renew the invitation, she declined it—and nevertheless obtained the recovery of her son.

Visconti Duke of Milan, and Philip the Hardy Duke of Burgundy, were no less pressing to obtain her residence at their courts. The first was positively refused, though her fortunes in France were far from being re-established. The latter had taken her son into his protection, and had tempted her by an employment most congenial to her sentiments, a proposal of writing the reign of her patron Charles the Fifth—She had even commenced the agreeable charge, when death deprived her of that last protector likewise.

Destitute of every thing, with a son, an aged mother, and three poor female relations to maintain, her courage, her piety and the muse, supported her under such repeated calamities, the greatest of all seeming to her that of being reduced to borrow money—a confession perhaps never made by any other lady of so romantic a complexion. *Beau sire Dieu ! comme elle rougissoit alors ! Demander,*

der, lui cauſoit toujours un acces de fièvre; are her own words. Her latter days were more tranquil, and her ingenious and moral writings are favourable indications of her amiable mind, and juſtify the attention paid to her by ſo many powerful Princes.

If in diſcuſſing the validity of Lord Salisbury's pretenſions, I ſhall ſeem to call them in queſtion, though founded on the teſtimony of ſo competent a witneſs and cotemporary, I will not ſtart a cavil beyond where hiſtory will bear me out.

John Montacute Earl of Salisbury, appears by no means, from Dugdale's account, in ſo amiable a light as in his portrait drawn by Chriſtina. The genealogiſt does not even mention his commiſſion to treat of King Richard's marriage with the Princeſs Iſabel—only ſaying that he had a licence to travel into France. But perhaps his inſtructions were ſecret, and he might be ſent to ſound the inclinations of the French court before any formal demand was made.* Dugdale allows that he was

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employed

* *This is the more probable, as the Princeſs Iſabel was but ſeven years old when ſhe came over to be Queen of Richard; and as he was depoſed three years after, the*

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employed with the Bishop of St. Asaph to negotiate a peace with Scotland.

But that he was a very confidential instrument of his royal master, appeared from an act of state, which proved fatal to the Monarch, and was extremely unpopular in the eyes of the nation. He was *suborned*, says my author, to impeach the Duke of Gloucester, his Majesty's uncle, and the Earls of Warwick and Arundel in parliament, the conclusion of which tragedy was transacted at Calais in the person of the Duke.

Another circumstance in the Earl's life could not but tend to decry him with the majority in that age. "He was a chief of the Lollards, and the "greatest fanatic of them all, says Thomas of "Walsingham, being so transported with zeal, "that he caused all the images which were in the "chapel at Schenele, there set up by John Aubrey "and Sir Adam Buxhall, (his wife's former husband's)

the marriage was never consummated. Isabel was restored to her father, and was afterwards married to his nephew the Duke of Orleans; as her youngest sister Catherine was to our Henry the Fifth, son of him who had dethroned her sister's husband.

“bands) to be taken down and thrown into an
“obscure place; only the image of St. Catherine
“ (in regard that many did affect it) he gave leave
“ that it should stand in his bakehouse.”

The Earl attended his master into Ireland, but on news of the Duke of Hereford's landing in England, was dispatched thence with a great power, and landed at Conway—but soon was deserted by his forces, as the King himself was also, and was left almost alone.

On Richard's depofal, the Earl is faid to have had fair refpect from the fortunate ufurper, and not to have had his life called in queftion. Nevertheless he confpired with the Earls of Huntingdon and Kent to take away the new Monarch's life, and for that purpofe went to Windfor under the difguife of Chriftmas players—but finding that the plot was difcovered, they fled by night to Cirencefter. The townfmen affrighted at their coming in fuch numbers—here we may pause a little, and fufpect the accuracy of the hiftorian. It does not feem very probable that three great Peers who had difguifed themfelves like ftrolling players to furprife and murder a King, and who on the difcovery of their defign

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design had fled to Gloucestershire, should have been attended by a body of troops; yet troops there must have been, for the citizens of Cirencester were so affrighted, that blocking up them and their forces within the town, so sharp a fight ensued that it lasted from midnight till three of the clock in the morning, when the Earls being over-powered, surrendered themselves, and were beheaded about break of day.†

I do not question the veracity of the Earl's catastrophe, yet so vague, desultory, and unsatisfactory in general are the narratives of our ancient historians, that whoever has occasion to examine their relations critically, must be convinced that, except some capital outlines, the relators set down any random accounts they heard of events, and took no pains, employed no judgment, to reconcile the most absurd and contradictory.

Thus

† *Some historians do say that the conspirators not finding the King at Windsor, the plot being discovered, and hearing that he was marching against them with an army, retired to Cirencester, where the townsmen rising against them, the Earls of Salisbury and Kent were slain, and their heads being cut off, were sent to London.*

Thus though Christina is not warranted by our historians, they, on the other hand, are not supported by common sense. The elegance of her mind and learning certainly has drawn a portrait of her lover that gives us little idea of a turbulent Baron of that boisterous age: and it is unfortunate that the refined phantom which is commonly conjured up by the pen of a romantic lady, should seldom exhibit the picture of the manners of any age that has yet existed. Montacute, if we believe Walsingham, whom Dugdale transcribed, was a court-tool, who accused the King's uncle, was an accomplice in his murder, was a hot-brained heretic, was ungrateful to the Prince who had spared him, and even was so base as to plot his assassination. This is not exactly the bashful, self-denying, generous lover, who forswore marriage, because he had not courage to declare his passion but in a ditty, which too he acknowledged for a presumptuous offence. How far the sublimated notions of chivalry might impose respect on a true Knight, I cannot tell—but unluckily there is a coarse evidence, who devoid of sentiment, and regarding nothing but who begat whom, deposes against Christina's testimony, and That witness is genealogy. Far from forswearing matrimony, the Earl

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Earl was not only married, as we have seen, but his widow survived him, and had a grant of part of his forfeited lands for her subsistence. She had a son too of age so mature, that ten years after his father's death, he being then married, received the purparty of his wife's lands on the division of her estate with her sisters.

In other respects I should be inclined to think that the Earl of Salisbury's crimes might admit of alleviation. *Suborned* is a stigmatizing word—but that Thomas Duke of Gloucester was by no means the patriot martyr that he was represented, has been judiciously observed by Mr. Hume. Though the youngest of the sons of Edward the Third, he probably aimed at the crown, and affected with that view to censure, and perhaps to aggravate, the incapacity and worthlessness of his nephew; resenting surprisingly both in his manœuvres and catastrophe the Duke of Guise, who with still worse, or indeed with no pretensions, aspired to depose Henry the Third, and set himself on the throne of France. Both Richard and Henry felt the pre-dominant ascendant of their rivals, and too weak to counteract by policy, or to stem by manly hardihood, their insolent competitors, they stooped to
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the infamy of assassination—and precipitated by the odium of that act the destruction they had hoped to ward off. The Duke of Hereford, whose nearer title would have been obstructed by Gloucester's ambition, lamented his uncle's fall, at which he must have rejoiced, and reaped the harvest that Gloucester had sown for himself.

The Earl of Salisbury, as a faithful subject, might have abhorred and dreaded the Duke's machinations, and for aught we know to the contrary, might have obtained proofs of his guilt. The same fidelity to his legal master must have inspired him with detestation of the usurper Henry; nor, as the latter, after Salisbury's death, called to severe account some of Richard's ministers who had dipped their hands in the death of Gloucester, must we rely too rashly on Henry's mercy to him, which might amount to no more than not having yet punished him. If Henry's indulgence is problematic, the crime of ingratitude vanishes—and if Salisbury, Huntingdon and Kent, retired to Cirencester with armed forces, I should believe that they had made an attempt to dethrone the usurper by arms, and found him prepared, rather than that they meditated to assassinate him at a mummery.

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In a word, though I cannot on such doubtful characteristics admit the Earl into the choir of English poets, I must as a good protestant suspect that his zeal as a Lollard occasioned our monkish annalists to blacken his actions; and I must admire the fervor of the amiable Christina's love, which could counterbalance the prejudice of education and of the times, and aid her to discover virtues and innate worth even in a heretic, who had treated St. Catherine with so little politeness and decorum as to banish her into a bakehouse.

F I N I S.



